

Trusting in the Fairness of God: a study series for fellowship groups

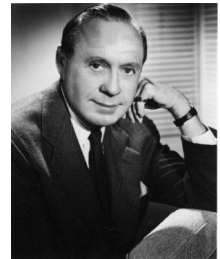
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The Christian life is about building relationships, rather than about adopting roles, and this series of studies seeks to understand the ways of God from an eternal perspective. Sometimes, when looking at issues from the human point of view, we are tempted to think of them as not being fair.

Susan and Marshall Shelley ("Our Merciful Judge" ISBN 0-85111-353-2 Inter-Varsity Press) tell the heartbreaking story of the birth of a daughter, Mandy in March 1990 with Microencephaly – an undersized brain. Mandy was never able to grasp with her hand, or crawl, sit up or speak. She was also subject to fits and then, just before her second birthday she contracted Pneumonia and died in hospital eight days later, unable to fight the infection. As if that was not enough, Susan had given birth three months earlier to a second child, a son, Toby. Amniotic tests had revealed a serious chromosome abnormality that had meant Toby would have no chance of living. In fact he lived for just two minutes after birth. There was no connection between the two incidents, both just freaks of nature. Susan and Marshall were both committed Christians but had to turn desperately to scripture to discover whether God can be trusted to treat people properly.



We would all like to receive the good things of life but not the bad things but life is not like that. The late comedian Jack Benny, famous for one-liners, once quipped when presented, in his eighties, with another television award: "I don't deserve this ... but I've got arthritis, and I don't deserve that either!"

(1) The Most Deadly Temptation

Every day, it seems, more and more laws are passed. European legislators in Brussels turn out regulations every few minutes. Many are not followed and fewer are understood.

Q 1 Laws can't all be bad! Could members of the group each nominate one law which they are pleased *is* on the statute book?

Read Genesis 3

When people commit offences today, their actions are often explained away on the basis of the baggage which they have carried into adult life. The emotional baggage of feeling unloved during childhood; perhaps brought up in a single parent situation. The social baggage of being brought up in relative poverty. Perhaps the moral baggage bad role models within the home or outside of it.

Q 2 In the perfect environmental setting of Genesis 3 none of these things applied to Eve. What does this teach us about the fundamental nature of temptation?

Q 3 What tactic lies behind the serpent's apparently innocent question?

Your author used once upon a time to be responsible for selling waste platinum, gold and silver to scrap merchants who called at the business from time to time. An opinion was quickly formed of those that visited that they were dishonest through and through. The spring balance was suspected of having been tampered with to under-read. The price quoted was less than the going rate. The arithmetic by which the sum due to us was worked out always seemed to involve a mistake in the tradesman's favour, and if we weren't careful, the money counted out was short!

Q 4 Which of these various deceits was worst? Think about it. If the man suddenly developed a conscience about all of this, he could turn over a new leaf at his next port of call and get all his sums right. But what else would he have to do?

Q 5 What does this anecdote tell us about the nature of this most deadly temptation? What does it meddle with? How important is it for us to trust in God's fairness? If God's eternal scales are unreliable, how could they be recalibrated?

Q 6 Eve does not quote God accurately either. What significance do members of the group see in her embellishment of God's instruction (v.3)?

Q 7 In what ways are people today led to believe, as the tempter suggested here (v.4), that disobeying God's instructions (sin) has no consequences?

Q 8 Notice how the tempter questions God's motives (v.5). Why is planting doubts about a person's motives one of the most dangerous assertions to make?

A relationship can never be built on a foundation where there is no trust. This is true in human relationships. If you are questioning a person's motives, no matter what they do, it won't be good enough. Even the good things they do are suspected of having been done for some selfish motive. When trust is destroyed there is no way relationship can grow. So it is in relationship with God. The real sin here has been denying God's goodness, and that he has our own good at heart in his purposes for us. This sin prevents us trusting God.

Next study (2) When Life Seems Unfair (Job 1-2)